Towards an Analytical Framework on Fear of Crime and its Relationship to Print Media Reportage

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the phenomenon of fear of crime and its relationship to print media reportage. Fear of crime as a concept is discussed initially, in order to justify it as a worthwhile area of investigation, and a number of statistics are then examined which show how widespread and serious a problem fear of crime is in modern societies. Following this a literature review encompassing a wide range of perspectives on fear of crime is presented, which includes four key viewpoints held by established theorists. The most significant and important part of the paper is an analytical framework on fear of crime and which aspects of print media reportage cause it. The framework highlights source credibility, the way in which the article is written and the locality of the crimes being reported as key factors in causing fear of crime amongst readerships.

The way in which violent crime is reported in the print media, both in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, has long been a source of fascination for academics. Numerous studies and scholarly works have been produced that investigate any possible links between this reportage and fear of crime in the readership of newspapers. Many of these studies have, however, taken a rather narrow and limited viewpoint on the subject, only examining one side of the argument. In the course of this paper a more inclusive approach to the examination of this subject, which is how newspapers, through their reportage of violent crime, promote a fear of crime in their readership, will be adopted. A full scope of varied perspectives from a wide variety of writers on the subject will be considered. The first section of this paper will consist of a literature review that encompasses the writings of a number of theorists on this subject across a wide range of viewpoints and opinions and the second major part of this paper will take the form of considered opinions on the matter, supported by carefully selected and analysed scholarly evidence. Original opinions on this subject will then be formed into an analytical framework on fear of crime and its relationship to print media reportage that will attempt to identify exactly what characteristics of stories on violent crime cause fear in their readers.

Fear of Crime in Modern Societies

Fear of crime, as a phenomenon, is widespread in Britain and most Western societies. Many people see crime as a major social issue and report feelings of being unsafe in the streets, particularly in inner city areas (Mawby & Walklate, 1994). Zedner (1997) argues that people’s fears of crime far exceed their chances of being a victim of crime, leading to suggestions that the fear of crime itself is a problem and in general that worries about crime are irrational. Zedner (1997) also points out that those most at risk of assault, such as young men, express far less worries about it
than those least at risk, with older people being a prime example. The 1995 British Crime Survey (BCS) showed that in England and Wales nearly a third of the respondents felt they were certain, very likely or fairly likely to be burgled in the next year, but when crime figures are examined they show that only 6% of households were burgled in 1995 (Croall, 1998). In the same survey one in six felt they were certain, very likely or fairly likely to be mugged whereas the statistical risk, as Mirlees – Black et al. (1997) point out, is less than 1 per 100.

The British Crime Survey asks respondents whether they are worried, fairly worried, or not worried at all about certain types of crime. In the 1995 edition, burglary was the crime that was worried about by the most people. Mirlees – Black et al. (1997) explain that women generally worried more than men about all offences, with rape causing the highest concern. Older people and women were also shown to have much greater levels of worry about walking in the streets at night. A number of theorists have written on the subject as to what extent people’s fear of crime is irrational. In criticising early crime surveys, Realists stated that these fears were not related to the experiences of the respondents (Croall, 1998). Also, the levels of worry present amongst women concerning rape appear to be far more rational when the extent of unreported rape is taken into account (Zedner, 1997).

For those sections of the population living in areas with high levels of crime, fears are more related to their perceived risk, and higher levels of fear may be realistic. Recent crime surveys have also shown that the highest levels of fear are present amongst low-income groups, paralleling their higher risk of being victims of crime (Kinsey and Anderson, 1992; Mirlees – Black et al., 1996). It is possible that the higher levels of fear held by older people and lower income groups may reflect the more severe impact of crime on these groups. Due to the greater likelihood of them being physically frail, older people may worry more about physical violence because they would take longer to recover from any attack. Additionally, those with lower incomes are less likely to take out insurance to guard against burglary, and can least afford to replace goods taken from them, leading to greater fear of being burgled. Other factors which may affect them are the nuisance value and loss of income and / or time in going through the legal process. Kinsey and Anderson (1992), state that these groups report more severe financial implications and longer lasting emotional effects. It does not seem, therefore, that their worries about crime can be dismissed as irrational. Another possibility to explain why people have a fear of crime is that they may be worried about crime in general; encompassing concerns such as moral decline, neighbourhood decline, public drunkenness or general feelings of insecurity. Worries concerning the risks faced by members of their family may also cause a fear of crime in certain people. So, rather than feeling they are personally immediately at risk of victimization, some may have worries over general levels of crime (Croall, 1998).

It may also be useful to explore the extent to which worries about crime affect people’s routine activities. This can, however, be difficult to extract from general questions of feelings of safety. It may be the case that older people avoid walking on the streets at night, but this could be due to the fact they are afraid of falling in the dark or physically infirm rather than through worries about crime. Others may not go out after dark because of childcare commitments, having no car, nowhere to go or little spare money for leisure (Mirlees – Black, 1996). In the 1996 British Crime Survey only 3% of the women sampled gave crime – related reasons for staying in at night, a
figure which rose to 9% amongst older people and climbed even higher in inner – city areas (Mirlees – Black, 1996). Women were also more likely to go out in a car rather than walk and go out with someone else in addition to avoiding certain streets (Kinsey and Anderson, 1992). Fear of crime is a real societal problem that affects many different social groups and sections of the population. Having established that fear of crime is a worthwhile avenue of investigation, an assessment of which particular aspects of the way in which newspapers report violent crime goes towards promoting a fear of crime in their readership will provide a useful exercise.

**Fear of Crime and the Media**

When examining the perspectives on fear of crime and its relationship to how newspapers report violent crime taken by sociological theorists it is necessary to acknowledge that a wide range of viewpoints exist. In this portion of the paper an examination of a wide range of sources that encompass a number of different perspectives will be undertaken. A prominent writer who has produced a number of articles on this subject is David L. Altheide (1991,1997,1999). Altheide discusses how fear pervades popular culture and the news media. An ongoing study conducted by Altheide demonstrated that the word fear is present in news reports in all newspaper sections of the media and transfers from one topic to another. According to Altheide, fear today is embraced and constitutes a “Major public discourse through which numerous problems and issues are framed” (Altheide, 1999: 476).

Altheide discusses the way in which news, particularly news concerning crime, has become interlinked with the entertainment format which dominates many news programmes. Changes in information technology and communication methodology and delivery have influenced the way in which social issues and problems are approached. News concerning crime has been developed into a ‘problem frame’. Frames, according to Altheide, focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed and, most importantly, how it will not be discussed. The media treating complex events such as violent crime and its related causes and effects as problems fits neatly into the entertainment format. The driving force of commercialism brought about the entertainment format in news coverage, and through this the problem frame emerged. Any distinction between news and non – news has been bridged by entertainment criteria (Altheide and Snow, 1991). News programmes are becoming more like entertainment programmes as programming is moulded to suit a culture geared to a media logic that folds TV criteria, discourse and perspectives into everyday life. Reality TV even celebrates the stereotypes and images of news reports about crime and fear (Cavender and Bond – Maupin, 1993). Americas Most Wanted, a popular program featuring dramatic re - enactments of brutal crimes, was thought by a majority of Americans to be a news program.

Altheide provides another example of how crime is transformed into entertainment when he talks about how news coverage of events foreshadows future TV movies. TV news becomes, in effect, a kind of preview or advertisement for ‘coming attractions’. The Waco siege in 1993 was an example of this, as a movie dramatisation of what occurred was in production before events had fully unfolded. The time period between the occurrence of the actual event and its airing as a primetime film has been reduced to a matter of weeks or even days. Real problems
such as violent crime are made interesting and newsworthy by the way in which they are approached by the news media. Murders, muggings and violent assaults are wrapped up and packaged as entertainment. This light and frivolous approach to violent crimes trivialises them and passes off the suffering of human beings as something that can be sold and profited from. Having discussed the way in which sections of the media can cause a fear of violent crime in its readers it is now necessary to move on and examine the way in which the perceived credibility of the source can play a major role in this process.

Source Credibility and Fear of Crime

Koomen et al. (2000) hypothesise that source credibility plays a major role in determining the levels of fear that are aroused in the reader. Background is provided to their study by drawing on a number of sources such as Bernard (1992) who used the mass media as an explanation for seasonal variations in fear of crime in France. The reduction of political activity during the French summer leads to more column inches being devoted to other news such as reports on crime. This in turn consequently leads to a maximal fear of crime being present from June to October. In short, the more the mass media report on crime, the more readers fear it. Different newspapers have different levels of crime reportage, so therefore fear of crime will vary between the readers of certain newspapers. An example of the way in which this can occur is provided by Williams and Dickinson (1993) who demonstrated differences in the amount of space and prominence given to crime, particularly violent crime, in 10 British newspapers. Consequently, these differences resulted in varying levels of fear amongst readers. When the research team conducted a questionnaire study of the same readers they found that there was a positive relationship between newspaper reportage of crime and fear of crime that appeared to be independent of any demographic factors associated with the readership.

However, a number of factors may also moderate the relationship between mass media presentations of crime and fear. These factors include the randomness of the crime, the locality and sensationalism of crimes and the self – relevance and sensationalism of the presentation of crimes (Health and Gilbert, 1996; Tyler and Cook, 1984). Heath (1984) demonstrated that crime presentations which contain no information about any possible motive arouse more fear than those where a motive is discussed. Random, local crimes are frightening prospects for the reader. Also, reading about bizarre, violent crimes resulted in more fear if the crimes occurred locally. A body of social psychological research suggests that source credibility leads to attitude change (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; McGuire, 1985). When a reader considers the message source to be more credible, they will show more interest in the message and will be more positively orientated to it, resulting in more agreement with the position held by the message. So, crime information, presented by a more credible source will be seen as valid information that cannot be explained away and must be taken seriously. If this information from the credible source has fear – arousing properties, it may consequently instigate fear. When information on crime comes from a less credible source, however, it is not seen generally to be valid or worthy of consideration.
In the study conducted by Koomen et al. (2000), they hypothesised and found that the readers who were provided with an article on street robberies, and told it was published in a credible newspaper, reported more fear of robbery / crime in general than those who though the article was in less credible newspaper or those in the control group who read no article whatsoever. Additionally, those who read the more credible article were more concerned about robbery in general as a societal malaise than those who did not read the article. As was predicted by Koomen et al. (2000), the effect of the article on fear of robbery, fear of crime in general and concern about robbery as a social problem fully depended on the credibility of the source. It was also found that, women reported more fear of robbery, fear of crime and concern about crime as a social problem than men. So, after analysing the way in which the perceived credibility of a source can affect levels of fear of crime it will now be advantageous to study what impact the locality of the crimes being reported can have on the reader.

The Locality of Crimes being Reported

Liska and Baccaglini (1982, 1990) provide another perspective on the way the portrayal of violent crime in newspapers impacts on levels of fear. They discuss how over the last 15 to 20 years fear of crime has emerged as an important research topic. In their paper “Feeling Safe by Comparison: Crime in the Newspapers” they discuss how levels of fear can vary across macro units such as neighbourhoods and cities. The study focuses on three main points, the first of which is the extent to which the characteristics of newspaper coverage affect fear. The next point is the extent to which the characteristics of coverage mediate the effect of crime rates on fear and finally the extent to which these effects and mediational processes are contingent on social status. Other research has examined the effects of structural characteristics of macro units, such as crime rates, social disorganisation, and racial composition, on fear. Although it seems reasonable to assume that variations in the fear of crime across macro units should reflect corresponding fluctuations in their crime rates, studies made of neighbourhoods (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981; Taylor, Gottfredson and Brocer, 1984) and cities (Garofalo, 1979; Liska, Lawrence and Sanchirico, 1982) indicate that the effect of crime rates on fear is very weak. These findings are also consistent with those from studies of individuals which show that those who experience victimization, either directly or indirectly through the communicated experiences of others, experience much higher fear than those who do not.

Having being unable to clearly connect fear to crime rates at either macro or micro levels, some researchers (Garofalo and Laub, 1979; Taylor and Hale, 1986) argue that fear of crime takes on additional properties and becomes more than simple fear, being instead associated with a psychological syndrome of anxiety, worry and nervousness, known as urban unease. The disorganization and physical/social disabilities of contemporary urban life, typified by symbols of disorder and crime, such as teenagers on the streets, abandoned buildings, graffiti, use of illegal drugs, public drunkenness and vandalism are thought to increase urban unease and consequently fear of crime. Other researchers argue that many of the above conditions are not just associated with general social disorganisation, leading to general unease and anxiety, but that they are directly associated or perceived to be directly associated with street crimes, forming a direct link to fear of crime. This argument is also made
explicitly with regards to race, as Swigert and Farrell (1976) argue that public beliefs and commonly held stereotypes link those who are not white to dangerous street crime in the US. Even the mere presence of non–whites may lead some white people to believe that they are at greater risk of victimization according to Lizotte and Bordua (1980).

The sample employed by Liska and Baccaglini (1990) consisted of the 26 major U.S. cities included in the National Crime Survey. Ten thousand respondents aged sixteen and over from each of the 26 cities formed the sample. In discussing how media coverage can affect levels of fear a number of points are made. Homicide stories show by far the strongest relationship to fear, with local stories increasing fear of crime and non – local stories decreasing fear of crime. It seems that coverage of crime in other cities makes people feel safe by comparison. Liska and Baccaglini (1990) state that it is important for studies into fear of crime to consider the fact that there are differences between local and non – local violent crimes being reported in newspapers. When rural residents read about homicides and violent crime that occurs in urban areas, they may feel safe in comparison. So, because crime in their area seems lower than it is in the cities, rural residents consequently experience lower levels of fear of crime. A city’s social image or reputation as crime – ridden and dangerous affects fear of crime, but initially the reputation held by a city is affected by the number of local homicide stories reported in the first fifteen pages of local newspapers. Therefore, the number and location of stories on violent crime in local newspapers affects levels of fear of crime in local residents, which in turn leads to certain cities being labelled as dangerous and crime – ridden. The next issue to be discussed will be the role played by expert’s quotes in feature articles on crime and the extent to which they play a role in causing fear of crime amongst the readership of a newspaper.

*Expert’s Quotes in Features on Crime*

Another aspect of the way in which newspapers report violent crime that may lead to fear of crime amongst its readers is the way in which quotes by ‘experts’ are employed in articles on crime. Welsh, Fenwick and Roberts (1997) studied this by drawing a sample of feature newspaper articles from *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times* and *The Chicago Tribune*. Welsh et al. (1997) also discuss other writers who have theorised on this subject. A large body of research has focussed on the social construction processes that dictate how crime becomes crime news. Many investigations have been conducted into the relationship that exists between the media and the primary definers of crime, such as law enforcement officials, in locating answers about the role played by the police in shaping the image held by the public of crime (Barak, 1994; Chermak, 1994; Hall et al., 1978). Hall et al. (1978: 68) make a worthwhile point when they state that: “What is most striking about crime news is that it very rarely involves a first – hand account of the crime itself, unlike the “eyewitness” report from the battle front of the war correspondent. Crime stories are almost wholly produced from the definitions and perspectives of the institutional primary definers”. As public officials whose credibility is derived from their positions of power and prestige impose primary definitions of crime early on in the defining stage of the social construction of news, their ideological perspectives dominate the field. So, primary definers or law enforcement
officials succeed in establishing the terms of reference from which all discussion of crime emanates, and even dissenters must at least acknowledge the dominant ideology that is at the centre of all discourse on the subject.

The articles selected for the study were those indexed as features and which contained at least one quote from a crime expert. Feature articles were selected as they typically discussed crime in depth and featured prominent quotes from experts. Two groups of experts were studied, the first being state managers, a term encompassing law enforcement officials and those from the legal profession. The other group of experts were intellectuals, made up of professors and non – academic researchers such as analysts.

Welsh et al. (1997) particularly highlighted in their analysis the presence of alarmist reactions to crime that are instrumental in generating fear of crime. Alarmist reactions to crime are indicative of moral panic, defined by Mann (1984: 255) as “a turbulent, excited or exaggerated response to deviance as a social problem”. Alarmist reactions to crime produced by state managers such as politicians and law – enforcement officials can also take on another dimension, appealing to citizens and voters fears for the purpose of advancing political agendas such as increased expenditure on the criminal justice system. These alarmist reactions to crime by state mangers may further contribute to even greater levels of fear as they are delivered by seemingly credible public figures. The study found that in 37% of all quoted statements remarks which were made confirmed crime (and fear) as a problem, which was the most common theme. Statements criticising popular perceptions of crime and comments critical of official statistics and trends were also extremely underrepresented, occurring in just 13% and 11% of all the sampled articles. It seems therefore that experts commenting on crime are far more likely to talk it up and over – play the extent of crime rather than reassuring the public or challenging popular and official perceptions of crime levels. This may consequently lead to increased levels of fear of crime amongst the readership of newspapers. Having tackled four key issues in the field of fear of crime and its relationship to print media reportage, the main focus point of this paper will now be addressed, namely the formulation of an original analytical framework.

Towards An Analytical Framework

Violent crime occupies myriad column inches in newspapers of all different types all across the world. Stories on violent crime possess many separate characteristics that depend on which countries they are printed in, what type of newspapers they are featured in etc. It would be impossible to survey a newspaper from every country so I have chosen to concentrate on stories about violent crime that originate in papers based in the United States of America and Britain as these are the countries where in depth scholarly work and studies have been conducted. In order to formulate an analytical framework on the particular characteristics of violent crime stories that cause fear it was first necessary to understand what a typical story on violent crime looks like, how it is presented and how the information is conveyed to the readers of the article. In dealing with the way in which different types of newspapers present violent crime it is necessary to point out that two main types of newspaper exist, tabloids and broadsheets. British tabloids such as the Daily Mail, The Sun and the
Daily Star tend to present stories on violent crime in a manner that possesses a number of common characteristics. The first of these characteristics is the fact that stories in tabloids on violent crime tend to be short, to the point and generally lacking in any analysis of the events that occurred. Rather than looking in any great depth at why exactly a crime has occurred and what its possible consequences are, tabloids instead present the perceived facts and normally not a lot more. When reporting, stories tabloids tend to utilize a high proportion of sensationalised language, with emotional turns of phrase that focus on the feelings of those close to victims frequently employed. A great deal of intrusion into the lives of grieving relatives occurs in the course of tabloid reportage of violent crime, as those closest to victims on major cases are harassed and harried, constantly canvassed for their opinion and true feelings on the incident. A large number of photographs also tend to be employed to accompany articles on violent crime in tabloids, which seems to be an attempt to engage the reader fully in the story by providing pictorial evidence of the events that have occurred.

Broadsheets such as the Daily Telegraph, The Guardian and The Times also report stories in a manner that is generally similar, and the common characteristics that are possessed by these newspapers are as follows. Broadsheets, when reporting on violent crime, tend to devote more column inches to stories than tabloids. They delve into a greater depth of coverage and examine factors such as why the events have occurred and what their possible causes may be. The language used in these stories tends to be far less emotional and sensational than that which is employed in tabloids as when the facts are reported they are, on the whole, delivered without embellishment or unnecessary over sensationalisation. Rather than placing the spotlight on the family and friends of the victims, broadsheets tend to rely on reporting the facts of the matter and any possible causes and / or consequences of the story. The definitions and typical characteristics possessed by these two very different types of newspapers have been gleaned from my undergraduate dissertation, entitled Violent Crime in the Media: Its Portrayal by Tabloid and Broadsheet Newspapers.

Before going on to discuss exactly how an analytical framework can be formed on fear of crime it is first necessary to make a number of points which justify why this particular theoretical development is necessary. In conducting extensive research on the subject of how the print media’s reportage of violent crime promotes a fear of crime in its readership a number of issues emerge. Firstly, theorists writing in this particular area of sociological endeavour tend to adopt a rather narrow and limited approach, focussing on a small and specific area of the topic through detailed and very tightly defined empirical investigations. Very few have chosen to broaden their focus in an attempt to construct a truly inclusive and universal theoretical standpoint. It is, of course, necessary for a large number of empirical studies to be conducted into any subject as without thorough investigation into the major aspect of a topic there is no way in which other theorists can possibly hope to make generalisations without having this base of empirical studies to build on. So, in some small way this is an attempt to advance the debate on the ways in which newspaper reportage of violent crime can promote fear by evolving my own analytical framework on the subject, employing both the work of others and original thinking. The theories that have been discussed previously in this paper will be employed as well as other suitable and worthwhile scholarly works carefully selected for this purpose. It was felt necessary to examine and include as many different perspectives as possible, and this was
accomplished by taking four main viewpoints on the subject then expanding outwards from these works by using supplementary writers who have theorised on these areas to provide a greater depth of knowledge and authority to the paper. When addressing the construction of the analytical framework itself it was felt necessary to adopt a multi – faceted approach to this task. As the area of fear of crime in relation to print media reportage is a complicated one it is obviously the case that an in – depth and carefully considered framework would be necessary to explain it. The analytical framework that follows has three main aspects that work towards explaining why readers derive a fear of crime from certain articles, and these are source credibility, presentation and style and the locality of the crimes being reported.

**Source Credibility**

The first aspect of my analytical framework is the perceived credibility of the source. The work by Koomen *et al.* (2000) (discussed earlier in this paper) puts forward a compelling case for the argument that perceived source credibility plays a large role in determining whether or nor a reader will derive fear of crime from a newspaper article. It is useful, however, to add another observation to supplement this, namely the fact that what is credible in one person’s eyes is not in another persons’, as this is a point Koomen *et al.* (2000) have neglected to make. For example, it may be the case that one reader sees a tabloid newspaper as being far more credible than a broadsheet as this is what they are used to reading and most familiar with.

This criterion is an important one for this new analytical framework as perception is key in the case of fear of crime. Despite the fact that people are unlikely to be victims of crime statistically, as demonstrated earlier in the article, many still perceive crime to be a major societal and social problem in the United Kingdom. Hence, when people read in a source that they perceive to be credible about violent crime that is occurring in the country as a whole as well as in their immediate locality, they perceive that they are likely to be victims and a fear of crime consequently results. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) and McGuire (1985) are just two examples of social psychological research that support the viewpoint that source credibility plays a major role in determining whether or not a reader will derive a fear of crime from newspaper reportage of violent crime. These theorists state that when a reader perceives a source to be credible they pay more attention to it and consequently agree with the message that it is conveying, whether it is on the subject of violent crime or any other topic.

**Presentation and Style**

The next aspect of my analytical framework is the way in which the actual story on violent crime is presented and written by the newspaper. This encompasses a number of factors such as the language used in both the headline and the main body of the text, the aspects of the story that are focussed on, any quotes that are utilised from “experts” and the amount of space devoted to stories on violent crime by the newspaper.

Chiricos *et al.* (1997) provide a perfect example of how the use of sensationalised and emotional language in the text and headline of a story on violent crime can create massive levels of fear in readers. They detail how the rape and murder of two
teenage girls by six gang members was turned into a national media feeding frenzy. Typical fear causing headlines from this moral panic included “Teen Violence : Wild in the Streets”, “In a State of Terror”, “Taming the Killers” and “Florida : State of Rage”. This explosion of sensationalised headlines in the popular print media caused a knock - on effect throughout the American media as a whole, with television and newspaper stories on violent and juvenile crime increasing in number by 400% in the next five months. This inevitably led to public concern over crime increasing dramatically, as Americans ranking crime or violence as the nation’s greatest concern leapt from 9% to 49% between January 1993 and January 1994. At every level of American government politicians raced through haphazard and ill – conceived policy amendments designed to combat the ‘problem’ of violent crime in society. Proposals put forward to stem this ‘epidemic’ included “everything from castration to caning, from fingerprinting school children to incorporating military technology in the latest ‘war on crime’ (Chiricos, 1997: 342). It was, of course totally irrelevant to those who were conducting this moral crusade that levels of violent crime were actually in decline. It is this kind of irresponsible and reckless sensationalisation of individual incidents that causes real and totally unjustified levels of fear of crime in those who consume the print media and take it at face value, believing it to be the gospel truth. An additional example of the impact of sensationalism is provided by Stapel and Velthuijsen (1996). They found that vivid, sensational newspaper reports on a car accident caused far more concern about road safety as a societal and governmental problem in those who read it than was present amongst those who read a dull, sober and non – sensationalised version of exactly the same story.

The aspects of a story on violent crime that are focussed on by a newspaper report also play a role in causing fear of crime. When newspapers choose to highlight purely the details of the incident as it occurred without placing the crime in any context, people derive a fear of crime from this. Heath (1984), in a study on this subject, highlighted the fact that articles which contained no information about any possible motive or reason for the crime aroused more fear than when crimes were discussed fully and frankly with any possible motive or reason behind them disclosed.

Another key part of the way in which an article is written that can contribute to causing a fear of crime is the use of quotes from ‘experts’. The work by Welsh et al. (1997), discussed earlier, is useful in understanding how this process occurs. Those who generally provide these quotes, namely high - ranking government and law enforcement officials in addition to senior academics, occupy positions of power and privilege in society. It is very rare that a ‘dissenting voice’ as it were, someone who contradicts the official line of the establishment, is allowed a chance to put forward their opinions in a major newspaper. The agendas held by those who speak for the establishment, the politicians, academics and law enforcement officials, vary, but what does not vary is the overwhelming proportion of these senior figures who chose to voice alarmist messages about crime. Welsh et al. (1997) found that 37% of all statements made confirmed crime and fear as a problem, with these alarmist messages being the most common theme present. Those criticising popular perceptions of crime made up only 13% of the cases and in just 11% of the articles surveyed people were critical of official statistics and trends. So, these well respected and high profile figures, when commenting on crime, generally choose to state how much of a problem, causing a possible fear of crime in the readers of these articles due to the prestigious positions of power they occupy.
The amount of actual column inches devoted by a newspaper to articles on violent crime is the final part of the way in which articles are written and presented that influences fear of crime. Williams and Dickinson (1993) studied 10 British newspapers and demonstrated that differing amounts of space and levels of prominence are given to reports on violent crime. These differences resulted in levels of fear of crime that varied between readers of different newspapers, and when the research team conducted a questionnaire survey of these readers they found that there was a positive relationship between the amount of space devoted to the coverage of violent crime and levels of fear, a relationship that existed independently of any demographic factors associated with the readership.

*The Locality of the Crimes being Reported*

The third aspect of my analytical framework is mainly based around the study conducted by Liska and Baccaglini (1990), discussed earlier. Their study found that stories about crime that occurred in an area close to the reader increased far of crime whereas reportage of crimes that happened in different areas decrease fear of crime, making the reader feel safe in comparison. I would like to add something to this, as I believe that a more realistic statement on this matter is necessary. When non – local crimes are reported I believe that in addition to decreasing direct fear of crime in the readers, there could possibly be an additional effect of bringing about a concern over crime in general as it occurs in society, leading to a different, less direct type of fear resulting. It is surely the case that reading about violent crime occurring in the same country as a person is living, no matter how far removed the crimes are, would not just simply reduce the reader’s fear of crime.

*Summary and Conclusion*

The framework outlined above discusses how the print media reportage of violent crime can contribute to levels of fear in its readers. It is important to make a number of points about this framework. All of the factors presented do not need to be in an article for it to cause a fear of crime, as only one or more may be enough to bring about fear in a reader. I hypothesize that the more of these factors that are present in an article, the greater the fear of crime that will be caused in the reader. It is not, of course, inevitable that every reader of newspaper articles on violent crime will derive a fear of crime from the piece. However, it should be noted that the framework is at this stage a theoretical one, and as yet has not been tested in an empirical study. Although some of the aspects of the framework are derived from empirical studies conducted by other theorists, the framework as a whole is so far untested and untried in a real world situation. In order for any analytical framework to gain credibility it is necessary for it to be tried and tested through empirical studies and until this has happened this framework will remain purely hypothetical. A number of factors come into play when considering whether or not an article will cause fear in a reader, and in my opinion these factors are the credibility of the source, the way in which the article itself is presented and written and the locality of the crime being reported. In conclusion, therefore, it can be seen that the area of fear and its relationship to print media reportage is a complicated one. Many factors have an impact on whether or
not readers are likely to derive a fear of crime from articles, and I have attempted to reflect this in the construction of my analytical framework. With three main strands and an additional number of smaller sections making up the framework, I feel that it could prove to be a useful tool for assessing the levels of fear that are caused by individual newspaper articles and stories.

References

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